

HUMANITIES

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NETWORK

CCH Announces Public Humanities Events Oakland, June 8 and 9

1990 Public Humanities Conference Schedule

Friday, June 8, 8 p.m.

Poet Nikki Giovanni Speaks
With a Special Performance by the Ceedo Senegalese Dance Company,
of Oakland's Mandaleo Institute

Saturday, June 9

James Moore Theater, Oakland Museum
"A Sense of Belonging, A Sense of Place"
A Public Conference

- 9:15 a.m. Traditional Feather Dancing by American Indian children from Oakland, in the MUSEUM GARDEN
- 9:45 Welcome by Don A. Schweitzer, Chair
California Council for the Humanities
- 10:00 OAKLAND PAST: Sources of Diversity
- Malcolm Margolin, publisher, Heyday Books, on early Ohlone life
 - Charles Wollenberg, History Department, Vista College, on the arrival of the Spanish and later immigrants
 - Shirley Moore, History Department, CSU Sacramento, on Black migration to Oakland and the East Bay
- 11:30 OAKLAND PRESENT: Who'd a Thought It? Improvisation in African-American Quiltmaking. Eli Leon, quilt historian, will show color slides and speak about the significance of the one-of-a-kind quilts that Oakland women have created.
- 1:15 p.m. Lake Merritt as a Social Construction, a survey of the lake from the Camron-Stanford House in Lakeside Park, with Richard Lichtman, School of Humanities, San Francisco State University and other scholars.
- 2:30-3:30 OAKLAND FUTURE: How Do We Live in a Multi-Cultural Community? a panel moderated by Lawrence P. Crouchett, Executive Director, Northern California Center for Afro-American History and Life. With Beverly Robinson, Folklore Department, U.C.L.A.; Renato Rosaldo, Anthropology Department, Stanford; and Bill Wong, associate editor, Oakland *Tribune*.
- 3:30 Jason and Justin Reed, from the Oakland-based Word Conjurers. Oakland 6th graders tell a story in tandem about Langston Hughes.

All events are free and open to the public. If you would like to reserve a box lunch for Saturday, June 9, please call the San Francisco CCH office, 415/391-1474. The cost is \$5.

CCH Awards Planning Grants for the Environment and the Common Good

CCH has awarded 11 planning grants in the "Environment and the Common Good" initiative. Full proposals submitted in this category are due on Monday, July 2, 1990.

As in 1989, CCH will make additional planning funds available to any of these organizations who wish to seriously investigate a cooperative final proposal. Please contact a member of the CCH staff for details.

Project Directors

"The Environment and the Common Good" Planning Grants

Diane Takvorian
Focus: environmental border problems
Environmental Health Coalition
1844 Third Avenue
San Diego, CA 92101
619/235-0281

Bill Bissell and Ephraim Smith
Focus: history of development, San Joaquin Valley
Center for Historical Preservation
c/o History Department
California State University
Fresno, CA 93704
209/278-2153

Melissa Aronson
Focus: Inter-cultural awareness and the environment
Ecology Action Educational Institute,
California State University,
Stanislaus, and the BRIDGE project
1124 13th Street
Modesto, CA 95354
209/667-3117

Remmy Kingsley and Kirk Hinshaw
Focus: environmental ethics
Gatekeepers to the Future
Fort Cronkhite
Building 1055
Sausalito, CA 94965
415/331-5513

Paul Ganster
Focus: borders, development, the environment
Institute for Regional Studies of the Californias
San Diego State University
San Diego, CA 92182-0435
619/594-5423

Warren Watkins
Focus: quality of life
Sonoma County Tomorrow
P.O. Box 5712
Santa Rosa, CA 95402
707/578-0595

Lori Mann
Focus: environmental decision making
Coyote Point Museum for Environmental Education
Coyote Point
San Mateo, CA 94401
415/342-7755

Carolyn Merchant
Focus: environmental history
Department of Conservation and Resource Studies
University of California
Berkeley, CA 94720
415/642-6730

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A Conversation with Nikki Giovanni



Nikki Giovanni will speak on June 8 at Oakland's Calvin Simmons Theater about "A Sense of Belonging, A Sense of Place." She has written many collections of poems for adults and children and, most recently, a book of essays entitled *Sacred Cows and Other Edibles*. She is professor of creative writing at Virginia Polytechnic and State University, Blacksburg.

Network: You've written a lot about your early experiences in life. How do you connect a sense of place and a sense of time?

Giovanni: Well, of course, I'm a born Southerner, and I spent all my summers with my grandparents in Knoxville, Tennessee, which is my birthplace. I grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, which is my parent's home. And I think longevity means a lot. It's possible to connect with a place when you haven't spent seasons there, but I think it takes time.

Network: When people come together who haven't been in a place for a long time, are there ways to begin to have a conversation?

Giovanni: I think one should share, I think that's the main thing. For example, I'm living down in Virginia. And, of course, I've only been here three years, but I feel like a Virginian because I'm a Southerner. And I think it's part of the responsibility

of the new group, the people who are coming, to open themselves up to the community in which they're living and it's part of the community's responsibility to make them welcome. But actually, homes don't change that much. I think that's how people actually feel about it. We all feel the same way about home, whether it's on the other side of the ocean, or the other side of the world, or across the street. And I think we all have a little anxiety when we move into someplace new. So this will not change.

Network: In a diverse state like California, cultural differences can create barriers to community. Do you see some of the barriers being overcome?

Giovanni: Well, I'm not a Californian, and I'm not particularly qualified to deal with what California's situation is, but I do know that the community is more important than the individual, in that accom-

modation has to be made. If I'm a Black American and I move next door to a white American, and into the neighborhood moves an Oriental American, we're not going anywhere. And it behooves us all to recognize that we have a commonality of community and basic civilization, basic politeness should prevail. One cannot concede to your basic racism, for example. I mean, you're not allowed to burn a cross on your neighbor's yard, nor to let your dog go and pooh on it. It's just so basic. We live together, because it's a small world.

Network: And yet recently, incidents of open racism seem to be on the rise.

Giovanni: They do, and that needs to be checked, I think, very quickly with both law and communities. I think one of the things that happens, too, is that the good people don't stand up against it. You know, the good white people would say, well, I understand why the skinheads burned a cross, or we're not going to fight it, or people say, I don't want to press charges, it's too much trouble. I think you have to use the law and the community to stop a lot of it.

Network: In your writing, you've said that racism is boring. Do you think people are getting tired of it?

Giovanni: Well, I don't know about the racists, but I know that the victims of racism are bored by it, because it's gone on far too long. It's not acceptable. There probably is a better word than boring.

Network: Is it too pressing a problem to be called boring?

Giovanni: It's quite boring, because it's not our problem, those of us who are victims. It's not our problem, and it's being made to be our problem. The problem is the racists. We didn't start it, we can't stop it — somebody else should do that. It's a problem not of studying why are Blacks discriminated against, but why are the discriminators doing it? Why do they beat up Orientals because they're mad at Iran? Why do they beat up Arab students? It's not our business, it's not our fault, and it is boring, because it takes up time that we would rather spend doing something more productive. I'm not speaking for all the victims of racism, but I don't think it's fair to ask us to spend our time trying to understand why these people do this. We have our own lives to live.

COMMUNITY EVENTS Planned around the Conference

In connection with the CCH annual Public Humanities Conference, Oakland community groups have planned a diverse series of exhibits, discussions, screenings and readings, exploring aspects of the theme, "A Sense of Belonging, A Sense of Place."

Building Intertribal Community: American Indians in Oakland

Sponsored by the Intertribal Friendship House, a photographic exhibit on the Oakland Indian community since 1949. Portions will also be shown of a second CCH-sponsored exhibit, "Roots Run Deep" from the Marin Museum of the American Indian, which examines changes and continuity in Indian cultures over generations. From May 18 to June 30, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. An opening reception and panel discussion on May 18 is open to the public. 415/452-1235.



Artist Harry Fonseca, known for contemporary interpretations of traditional Indian themes such as coyote figures. Photo: "Roots Run Deep" exhibit.

Who'd a Thought It? Improvisation in African-American Quiltmaking

Sponsored by the San Francisco Craft and Folk Art Museum, a quilt exhibit with several quilting demonstrations and talks by the exhibit's curator and other scholars, at Oakland City Square at City Center. This exhibit features unique quilts made by Oakland women and has been shown in museums nationwide. May 30 to June 16, 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. 415/775-0990.

1,000 Faces — A Community Art Work in Process: The Social and Spiritual Function of Masks in Contemporary Society

Sponsored by Festival at the Lake, an exhibit and discussion of 50 multi-cultural masks that Oakland artists have made using the faces of well-known residents. June 8 to 29 at the Oakland Public Library. On June 13, an illustrated lecture and discussion will look at the diversity and universality revealed in the masks. 415/464-1061.

Network: Are there lessons learned from the struggle in the 1960s for Black equality that can be applied to problems now?

Giovanni: Well, the Black movement, the civil rights movement, taught everybody. We taught the women, the anti-war movement, the gay movement, and all the rest, because we said, it's important to stand up. As it were, we ended up standing up by sitting down. But it's important not to silently be abused, not to assume that it will go away, if we don't talk about it, it will go away. It won't go away until we talk about it. Light has to be shed. So we would certainly encourage individuals to take whatever steps are available, whatever steps are necessary, to stop their victimization.

Network: You once wrote about the Black community's "bank account." Is using the language of business on the rise — the bottom line image?

Giovanni: I don't have a comparison in my mind that it's more prominent now. I know bottom line thinking is always dangerous, though. So, when you look at business, which in America for the last 20 years or so has looked at the bottom line, what they've become is short term. And it's one reason that the Japanese businessman is a better businessman than the American businessman, because the Japanese businessman traditionally looks at the long run. If all you're looking for is the bottom line, then every quarter you have to show a positive return. That's not wise, that I do know. And when we look at society that way, we have the same problem. I teach writing. If every writing student that I have has to publish the minute that he leaves or she leaves this institution, then, obviously, it's not going to work. And we would decide we shouldn't teach writing, because, after all, we didn't get any return for it. We can't think bottom line like that — you have to think long term. And there's your sports metaphor: it's very nice to be a sprinter, but what the world always looks for is the miler, the long-distance runner. Anybody can sprint.

Network: You've been teaching for some time now. Do you change hats at the classroom door?

Giovanni: Oh, for sure, no question about it. I teach at Virginia Tech, and I'm anticipating being here for quite some time. For me it represents a second profession, but it's a very emotionally rewarding profession. Because there's so much that happens

with writing that you know and you don't have anybody to really tell it to. I mean, you could explain to your kids or something, but they don't necessarily want to go into your profession. And it gives you an opportunity to share your knowledge, to help shape the way some other people are thinking. It's not an ideological situation, but you want to show the young people to expand their world, to push them to the perimeters, to test themselves a little more. And that's very rewarding. I think it's wonderful when a kid writes a good paper, and this is a kid who's been struggling and struggling, and you've been wondering, why am I wasting my time. And the kid finally comes through with the kind of paper, or the kind of poem, or the kind of reaction — in terms of writing. My youngsters know that there's no way that they have to agree with me. I don't look for agreement. And nobody writes like I do, so I don't want them to even try to write as I do. What I want them to do is find their own voice. And it takes college students — probably any student because they're so grade prone, so bottom line inclined — it takes them a minute to realize that they can't flatter you into accepting what they say just because they sound like you or echo some of your ideas. That's not necessarily what you were looking for. What you want is for them to be able to express themselves. I think that's very important, because this generation doesn't seem to read a lot. And, of course, you can't write well unless you read.

Network: Does teaching take away from your writing, from what you're working on?

Giovanni: I'm working on my students. It's very difficult to have the time to do your own writing when you're teaching. They're two separate things. I think teaching takes away from the time and the energy that you have to be a creative writer, and that's what I am. So, if I'm going to devote the time to teaching, I'm not going to have it left over. And people approach you on the level of, oh, this is too bad, you're not getting your own writing done. Well, obviously I have to do my own research. And people seem to forget that in order to write you have to have something to say. I never did understand people that can churn out a book a day, or a poem an hour, that kind of craziness — nobody has that much to say. And what you hope is that when you do say something, that it's worthwhile, that it has some merit.



The Ceedo Senegalese Dance Company will present a traditional African dance-drumming performance on June 8 at the Calvin Simmons Theater in Oakland, preceding Nikki Giovanni's lecture. The company is in residence at Oakland's Mandaleo Institute, a nonprofit African heritage coalition. The city of Oakland has become a major center for African music and dance activities. Photo by Harry Wade.

Oakland Out Loud: How the Different Cultures of Oakland Have Produced a Multi-Ethnic Literature

Sponsored by PEN Oakland Chapter, an evening program of Oakland-based writers reading and discussing works about Oakland. Novelist and U.C. Berkeley instructor Ishmael Reed will read from the works of Joaquin Miller, Jack London, and Ina Coolbirth. Also present to read and discuss their works will be Lucha Corpi, Julian Lang, Ed Bullins, Lee Mun Wah, and Floyd Salas. May 26 at 7 p.m., Concepts Cultural Gallery, 480 Third Street, Oakland. 415/549-9093.

Bone Games, Bird Songs, and Brush Dancers: Traditional Arts of Native California

Sponsored by the Local Cultures program at Festival at the Lake, a series of demonstrations of Native California dancing, games, and arts, with brief introductory talks. June 1 - 3, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Lakeside Park, Oakland. 415/464-1061.



Master artist Marn Seng Sae Chao teaches traditional Mien needlework skills to her nine-year-old daughter, Mey Chiem. Photo from "Mien Embroidery Project."

Jack London: Historical Figure to Popular Icon

Sponsored by the National Educational Film and Video Festival, three films on the life and work of Jack London, followed by discussions about London's relationship to Oakland. The films to be shown are *Jack London*, a World War II-era dramatic feature, the documentary *My Jack London: A Daughter Remembers*, and a docudrama starring Martin Sheen, *Jack London's California*. June 2, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Oakland Museum's James Moore Theater. 415/465-6885.

Mien Embroidery Project

Sponsored by the Laotian Handicraft Center, a program exploring how needlework traditions have changed among the Chinese-descended Mien immigrants since they've arrived in the United States. June 5 at 7:30 p.m., Richmond Civic Center Plaza, McDonald and 26th, Richmond. 415/526-4458.



Cultural Collisions and the Emergence of Chicano Literature

by Raymund Paredes, Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Development, UCLA

Last fall, the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles sponsored a conference on Chicano Poetry in California. Present for readings and discussions with scholars were poets Gary Soto, Lucha Corpi, Jose Montoya, Naomi Quinonez and Gina Valdés. Dr. Paredes' talk, from which this article is adapted, explored the development of Mexican American identity and expression. The conference was recorded for broadcast on Radio Bilingue in Fresno, tentatively scheduled for June 1990.

I'll begin with my own definition of Chicano literature. I use the term Chicano to refer to people of Mexican heritage who reside primarily in the United States, and I use it interchangeably with Mexican American. Chicano literature, to my mind, includes those works in which the writer's sense of *chicanismo*, or Chicano identity, figures prominently as an animating force. That is to say, the writer's sense of being an American of Mexican descent animates his or her work manifestly — often directly through the presentation of Chicano characters, Chicano issues, or Chicano speech, however the writer determines that these are to be used.

Not long ago, I heard a funny song on the radio about "las pachucas mas greñudas." This song was full of slang expressions, like "chale (no)," "vaisa (arm)," "canton (home)" — the kinds of expressions that I used to hear all the time when I was growing up in South El Paso. It was a wonderfully evocative song and it seemed to me thoroughly Chicano. But the Chicano qualities of a work can also present themselves rather subtly as indicators of a writer's sensibility. As an example I have in mind a marvelous short story from the 1940s by the writer from Arizona named Mario Suárez. The story is called "Señor Garza," and it deals with Garza's business, which happens to be a barbershop. He lives in a barrio called El Hoyo, and his barbershop is a hangout for all the people in the neighborhood. People come in, they sit around and talk, they drink beer occasionally, they gossip about all the events that are going on in the neighborhood — and indeed they seldom come in for a haircut. What is interesting about this story is that Garza enjoys his business more when the people come in simply to chat than he does when they come in for haircuts. In fact, when too many customers come into the shop and all the seats are filled, he's likely to close the shop down and go fishing. Obviously, this is not a typical American businessman, and the point to the story is revealed with these closing lines: "Garza, owner of Garza's Barbershop, but the barbershop will never own Garza."

It seems to me that Suárez is presenting Garza as the embodiment of a cultural value that stands in opposition to what he sees as the dominant American ethic, the ethic of profit. And he sees that contrary value as being integral to Chicano culture. Now, it doesn't matter whether we agree with Suárez that this kind of rejection of rampant materialism is actually part of Chicano culture. The point is that the writer feels that it is and presents this value as being distinctly Chicano.

On the other hand, having a Mexican name and being born and raised in East L.A. doesn't automatically ensure that one is a Chicano writer. There are a few writers out there with Mexican surnames who write beautifully but in no way reflect their heritage or engage Chicano culture. Now, I'm not suggesting that somebody who happens to have been born as an American of Mexican descent must, perforce, use that heritage in his or her work — the writer has the freedom to do whatever he or she pleases. But if that writer, for whatever reasons, chooses not to engage his or her ethnic heritage, then it seems to me what that writer is producing is not Chicano literature.

The second question I want to address at the outset is the issue of the origins of Chicano literature. There has been a considerable amount of dispute about this issue over the past 15 or 20 years. If you look at the scholarship dating back to the 1960s and early 1970s when this kind of work really got under way, you see that some scholars claim that Chicano literature is rooted in the pre-Columbian modes of expression, that there is a direct line of development between the sacred texts of the Mayas and Aztecs and more contemporary expression. The relationship was exaggerated, to a large extent because so many Chicano writers in the 60s and the 70s very consciously appropriated the materials of the pre-Columbian expression in their work. But that's a connection that appears for the most part quite recently; certainly in earlier periods of Chicano writing, especially in the 19th century, pre-Columbian expression had little conspicuous influence.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848, ending the Mexican War and leading to the transfer of virtually half of Mexican territory into American hands.

A second common practice is to argue straightforwardly in this way: The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848, ending the Mexican War and leading to the transfer of virtually half of Mexican territory into American hands. The people who were living in what was to become the United States had two options: going southward across the newly established border and retaining their Mexican citizenship or staying where they were and eventually receiving American citizenship. As it turned out the overwhelming majority of region's people, who numbered somewhere in the range of 85,000, decided to stay where they were and eventually accept American citizenship. One can argue about what this meant, but, in any event, the fact is that most of the people stayed. And, as a number of scholars have pointed out, these people by an act of politics, with a single stroke of the pen, suddenly became American citizens — Mexican Americans in

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the most literal sense of the term. And in that moment, so the argument goes, Mexican American literature, or Chicano literature, began.

The problem with this literal-minded approach to tracing the origins of Chicano literature is that it assumes that culture, including literary production, moves at the same pace as politics, so that when people become Mexican Americans in a political sense, they promptly begin writing as such. The fact is that for a generation or more after the signing of the treaty, Mexican American culture remained indistinct from Mexican culture generally. It took at least a generation for the Mexican Americans of the Southwest to begin to define their newly established relationship not only to the old country, but to the United States as well. Sure enough, beginning in the 1860s, one can detect signs of a distinct culture and a distinct form of literature emerging, born out of new geopolitical and cultural circumstances.

Like so many literatures, Chicano literature was born in conflict. It was born in the intensifying, and that's a key word, collisions between Mexican and U.S. cultures in the Southwest. One can see this in the *corrido*, or the ballad tradition that emerges in Texas and in parts of New Mexico, in the folk poetry particularly from certain regions in New Mexico, and to a lesser extent in some of the musical forms that flourished in California. Notice that I'm using the term literature very broadly, to include not only the traditional forms of literature, which is to say novels, stories, poems and so forth, but also to include songs. I want to emphasize that the *corrido* is a very important form of Chicano expression and is, after all, essentially a poem set to music.

You can begin to see the emergence of a distinct Chicano sensibility in the songs of conflict between Mexicans and Anglos. You can see this sensibility in fragments like "The Ballad of Juan Cortina" that comes out of Texas in the late 1850s and early 1860s. You can see it in the celebrated "Corrido de Kansas" that also comes out of Texas, dealing with the rivalry between Mexican and Anglo cowboys as they ride from the Texas ranching areas to the railroad points in the Midwest. And you can see it in the large volume of Spanish-language poetry that emerges throughout the Southwest.

I'd like to spend a minute talking about a stanza, just a stanza of poetry that appears in New Mexico. Its date is uncertain because the poem is anonymous, but this poem is wonderfully instructive of the kind of phenomenon that I'm talking about. This is the poem:

Me casé con una pochi
para aprender inglés
y a los tres días de casado
yo ya le decía, "yes"

In English the poem goes like this: "I married a pochi," or I married an Americanized woman — notice that the expression is "pochi" not "pocha" which is more common today. I married an Americanized woman, "para aprender inglés," in order to learn English, "y a los tres días de casado," and after three days of marriage, "yo ya le decía, 'yes,' " I was already telling her, "yes."

Now, notice several interesting things about this poem. First of all, the notion of a “pochi,” an Americanized woman, is critical, because that suggests that there is already some movement in the culture away from conventional Mexican traditions. If you don’t have that movement away, you can’t have either Chicano culture or Chicano literature. If there’s no movement, all you have is a large body of Mexican culture that’s existing in the United States. The poet recognizes the changed circumstances of his life. He’s in New Mexico after the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in what is now the United States. The narrator recognizes some need to learn English — that’s also significant in the process of the formation of Chicano culture. And, with the ending of the poem — at the end of three days of marriage, I was already telling her “yes” — he’s suggesting to us that there is some process of Americanization that dramatically changes the nature of male-female relationships. This is no longer a traditional Mexican relationship, in which the male would presumably be dominant. This is a relationship in which the woman, having acquired American ideas, demands equality. That’s a significant development, and it’s precisely this kind of dynamic, it seems to me, which leads to the emergence of Chicano literature.

The narrator’s suggesting to us that there is some process of Americanization that dramatically changes the nature of male-female relationships.

By the 1890s, the Chicano literary sensibility is very much in evidence. If you look at the very large body of newspaper literature of the period — mostly poetry, some stories, some personal narratives — you can see that the writers engage issues of critical interest to the Chicano community. They’re concerned, for example, with the retention of Spanish: What should be the first language of the people? They’re considering such issues as the question of education: Should they support the public schools, or should they continue to rely on the church for education? You also see a rather poignant consideration in the late 1890s of whether New Mexicans should join the American war effort in Cuba during the Spanish American War. You find poets making this sort of argument: Our allegiance to the country is distrusted; one of the reasons that New Mexico hasn’t been admitted to the Union is that so many people in Washington don’t think we’re loyal Americans. We need to prove that we are, and how better can we prove it than to join the war effort against our ancestors?

After the 1890s, and I’m compressing a lot of literary history here, you see that Chicano literature begins to grow steadily. Although our research is still very preliminary and the record that we have put together very fragmentary, I think that we can reach several general conclusions. By the early 20th century, Chicano literature is developing along two very distinct tracks. The dominant track was in Spanish and heavily folkloric, which is to say that it derived from sources such as the ballad, from legends, from folktales or *cuENTOS*, and was intended primarily for a Mexican American audience. The second track, much smaller in volume and in the number of writers, was composed in English. It was often aimed not at a Chicano audience, but at an Anglo audience. You can find this type of literature prominently in magazines like the

Overland Monthly of San Francisco. The *Overland Monthly* regularly featured a particular variety of “Mexican” stories and poems. They were usually romantic, even precious, full of dashing caballeros, primitive Indians, beautiful but limp señoritas — very much stories in the manner of Gertrude Atherton or Helen Hunt Jackson.

These two tracks remained more or less dominant, it seems to me, until 1945, when Josephina Niggli published an extraordinary book, *Mexican Village*, a book that I recommend to all readers. It’s about a young man named Bob Webster, a character who very much follows Niggli’s personal experience. The illegitimate son of an Anglo father and a Mexican mother, Webster is abandoned by his father because he’s too dark, and he’s raised by his Mexican grandmother in San Antonio. As a young man, very much confused, very much alienated from his own heritage, he begins to travel all over the world. He fights in North Africa, he participates in the Irish revolution in the early 20th century, and finally he gets the idea that he wants to open a small air transport business in South America. To save up the money necessary for the new business, he decides to work in Mexico for a year or so as a foreman of a cement quarry in the northern state of Nuevo Leon.

The action of this novel takes place after 1917, in the period after the Mexican Revolution. Webster arrives in a small village called Hidalgo and undergoes an extraordinary experience. He knows how to speak Spanish, although he hasn’t spoken it for a long time, and as the novel progresses, his Spanish becomes much more fluent. The citizens of Hidalgo are intrigued by him because he has an Anglo name yet he’s dark like a Mexican and he knows their language. And they’re also intrigued because he seems to be familiar with a lot of the customs of the area. He treats elders with the appropriate deference and he knows a lot of the local folklore. He knows legends about Pancho Villa and superstitions about the differences between white horses and black horses. Eventually, Webster, too, is startled by how much more he understands about Mexican culture than he had realized. As Josephina Niggli says, he has Mexican culture in his blood and it begins to manifest itself when he is in a Mexican environment. By the end of the novel, as you might suspect, Bob Webster decides that he’s going to remain in Hidalgo, he’s going to change his name, discarding his father’s name for that of his mother’s family. He’s going to stay in Mexico because he’s found a home, both culturally and psychologically.

This text is enormously important because Josephina Niggli suggested an alternative to the alienation and the isolation of Mexican Americans in American culture. She wasn’t suggesting literally, of course, that all Mexican Americans should move to Mexico; she was suggesting that Mexican Americans needed to recover their heritage in order to feel a sense of self, in order to feel a sense of cultural pride.

Just as remarkable as the theme of this book is its composition. The book is based on folklore, replete with legends and folktales; it’s also laced with proverbs and folksongs. And the book is even more remarkable for the way that Josephina Niggli captured the feeling of Spanish in English. Although the book was written in English, when it first appeared a lot of people thought that this was a translation of a Spanish text. But what Niggli did successfully was to capture the syntax, the cadence of Spanish in English. It seems to me that for these reasons *Mexican Village* is — despite the fact that its romanticism is dated, its ideology certainly obsolete — one of the most important works written by a Chicano writer. *Mexican Village* represents a syn-

thesis of the two foregoing traditions in Mexican American literature, a book accessible to Anglo readers but whose intimate knowledge of Mexican culture and the crises of Mexican American identity would appeal to Chicano readers as well.

Interestingly enough, the writer I mentioned before, Mario Suárez, began to publish short stories in the *Arizona Quarterly* just a couple of years after Niggli’s book appeared. To me, this moment is a kind of a watershed in the development of Chicano literature. For if Niggli represented a new development of contemporary Chicano writing, Mario Suárez represented yet another. Just as Niggli’s work was largely inspired by traditional Mexican expression and was highly romantic, Suárez’ work was inspired, although in a negative way, by contemporary American writing. Suárez responded very directly to the portraits of Mexicans in the work of John Steinbeck, particularly those in *Tortilla Flat*. Those of you who have read *Tortilla Flat* know that it’s a grossly demeaning book to Mexicans. It’s filled with Mexicans groveling in the mud, endlessly fornicating and drinking. There’s a Mexican woman in the book who gets pregnant regularly and never seems to know how it happens. One scene features a jailed Mexican who is being bitten voraciously by bedbugs, but they bother him hardly at all — after all, the jail provides better accommodations than he’s use to. There are many characterizations like these. Clearly, Suárez decided that he wanted to write stories about his neighborhood, El Hoyo in Tucson, that presented Chicanos in a much more authentic way. Suárez was obviously much influenced by Steinbeck’s notions of exoticism, his humor, his rendering of the isolation of Chicanos, but all these features appear in Suárez’ work in a positive manner.

Suárez is the first major writer, it seems to me, of the urban Chicano experience. He writes about the emergence of the pachuco as a kind of archetypal barrio figure. He writes about the entire process of acculturation with extraordinary insight. He has a story called “Kid Zopilote” about a young man named Pepe who goes to Los Angeles in the beginning of the pachuco phenomenon, and when Pepe goes back to Tucson he speaks a very peculiar variety of Spanish. He says things like “watchar” and talks about his “styleacho.” His parents, of course, are horrified and they start to call him a *zopilote*, a buzzard. Instead of feeling shame, he takes still greater pride in his identity, and by the end of the story it’s very clear that he’s found a sense of self that he’s not about to relinquish. In another extraordinary story, Suárez talks about the relationship between a Mexican father and a son rapidly becoming Americanized. The father wants the son to learn the art of cock fighting, which he sees as integral to Mexican culture, but the son wants to play baseball. Out of these sorts of conflict has Chicano culture developed.

Chicano literature has, of course, evolved considerably since the landmark works of Niggli and Suárez, but these authors remain prototypical. Chicano writers continue to locate themselves in the sometimes vast, other times narrow spaces between American and Mexican cultures. Contemporary Chicano writing can be set in the small towns of New Mexico or Nuevo Leon or in the immense barrios of Los Angeles; it can appear in either standard English or Spanish or hybrids of both languages. It can appropriate legends and songs centuries old or turn on last year’s political events. As a body of work, perhaps the single common denominator is its changeability, a quality forged in the constant interaction and collision of Mexican and American culture.

CALENDAR OF HUMANITIES EVENTS

EXHIBITS

May 1 through June 12
 "What Style Is It?" is an architectural exhibit at the Sutter County Community Memorial Museum, Yuba City. Museum hours are Tues.-Fri, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sat. and Sun., 12 noon-4 p.m. 916/225-4155

May 18 through June 30
 "Building Intertribal Community" is a photographic exhibit about the Oakland Indian community since 1949. Portions will also be shown of a second exhibit, "Roots Run Deep," which explores changes and continuity in Indian cultures over generations, at the Intertribal Friendship House, 523 East 14th Street, Oakland. Mon. through Fri, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. 415/452-1235



Willia Etta Graham, 87, will demonstrate her unique quilt making, as part of "Who'd a Thought It."

May 30 through June 16
 "Who'd Thought It? Improvisation in African-American Quiltmaking" is a quilt exhibit with demonstrations and talks, at Oakland City Square at City Center, 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Mon. through Fri.; and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sat. 415/775-0990

June 8 through June 29
 "1,000 Faces — A Community Art Work in Process: The Social and Spiritual Function of Masks in Contemporary Society" is an exhibit and discussion of 50 multi-cultural masks that Oakland artists have made using the faces of well-known residents, at the Oakland Public Library. 415/464-1061

June 22 through July 22
 "What Style Is It? " travels to the Redding Museum and Art Center, 56 Quartz Hill Road. Museum hours are Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sun., 12 noon-5 p.m.; closed on Mon. 916/225-4155

EVENTS

May 2
 "Nigerian Art-Kindred Spirits" is a film which profiles Nigerian artists whose work is reshaping Western expectations of African art. This film will air tonight on PBS, Smithsonian World Series. Please check your local listing for exact time. Ms. Carroll Parrott Blue, CCH Council member, is program producer for this film. 212/582-5521

May 7
 "The Wilderness Idea" is a film about American attitudes toward wilderness and will be screened at the Kabuki Theater, Fillmore Street at Post, San Francisco. Please confirm date and time. 415/346-3243

May 11
 "Lecture Series on the Culture of India" will explore the topic "Religion and Politics of Modern India," at the University Union 220, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, 12 noon-1 p.m. At 7:30 p.m., the series will continue with a lecture/discussion entitled "Shiva: The Lord of Yoga and Death," at the Cuesta Canyon Lodge, San Luis Obispo. 805/756-2041

May 12
 "Symposium/Workshop on Local History — and Preservation" is a one-day symposium/workshop on the local history and preservation of Placentia, Edwin T. Powell Building, 143 So. Bradford, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Placentia. 714/993-8117

May 12
 "California Indian Shamanism" is a one-day conference about the history as well as contemporary practice of the shamanic arts among California Indians, TV Studio, LI 1092, at California State University, Hayward. 415/881-3168

May 13
 "Moving Mountains" is a documentary film about the Southeast Asian Mien refugees and tells about the richness of their culture and the reality of their struggle to survive. The screening of this film is scheduled at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific American International Film Festival, Film Archives Melnitz Theater, UCLA, at 2 p.m. 213/206-8013

May 15
 "The San Francisco Stage: From Gold Rush to Earthquake" Lecture Series" presents a lecture/discussion "Looking for Isadora," at the San Francisco Performing Arts Library & Museum, 399 Grove St., 6 p.m.-7:30 p.m. 415/255-4800

May 18
 "Lecture Series on the Culture of India" will focus on the topic "Indian Philosophy and Non-violence," at the University Union 220, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, 12 noon-1 p.m. 805/756-2041

May 18
 "Lecture Series on the Culture of India" will continue with the lecture "The Role of Women in Indian Thought" at the Cuesta Canyon Lodge, San Luis Obispo, 7:30 p.m.-9:30 p.m.

May 31
 "Moving Mountains" will be screened again at the American Film and Video Festival occurring at the Westin St. Francis Hotel, Union Square, San Francisco at 11 a.m. 415/397-7000

June 1, 2, 3
 "Bone Games, Bird Songs, and Brush Dancers: Traditional Arts of Native California" is a series of demonstrations of Native California dancing, games, and arts with brief introductory talks, Festival At The Lake in Oakland, Lakeside Park, Grand Avenue and Bellevue entrance, 11 a.m.-6 p.m. 415/464-1061

June 1, 2
 "1990 San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival" will focus on the theme "Dances of Celebration" at the Palace of Fine Arts Theater, Bay and Lyon Streets, San Francisco, 8 p.m. A pre-performance talk discussing the context and the history of pieces which are presented will take place at 6:30 p.m. before the June 2nd performance only. 415/474-3914

June 8, 9
Public Humanities Conference: "A Sense of Belonging, a Sense of Place" (see page 1-3).

June 8, 9
 "1990 San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival" is performing "Dances of the African Diaspora," at 8 p.m., Palace of Fine Arts Theater, San Francisco. Curtain talk will be held before the June 9th performance only, at 6:30. 415/474-3914

CALENDAR

- June 15, 22, 29 "Routes of Rhythm with Harry Belafonte" is a documentary film on the Latin musical heritage of America and is narrated by Harry Belafonte. This film is scheduled to air on National PBS at 10 p.m. Please check your local listing for exact time. 213/392-8999
- June 16 "1990 San Francisco Ethnic Dance Festival" has scheduled an all day symposium promoting a deeper understanding of the traditional art forms of "ethnic dance," at the McBean Theater, San Francisco Exploritorium, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. "Dances From Around the World" is the theme for the performances on June 15 and 16, Palace of Fine Arts Theater, San Francisco, 8 p.m. Curtain talk will take place before the June 16th performance, 6:30 p.m. 415/474-3914
- June 16-17 "Frameline Symposium on Lesbian & Gay Media" will present panel discussions and scholarly presentations on the topic "The Rules of Attraction: A Conference on Lesbian and Gay Media," 347 Dolores Street, S.F. 415/861-5245
- June 30 "Visionary San Francisco" will present a symposium entitled "The Envisioned City: Dream, Design and the Reality in the Creation of San Francisco — 1865-1990," at the Herbst Theater, 401 Van Ness Avenue, S.F., 1 p.m.- 4 p.m. 415/863-8800
- July 12-14 "Filipino American History: The Legacy Lives" is a conference that will include exhibits, lectures, workshops, and a reception for authors at the Radisson Hotel, 500 Leisure Lane, Sacramento. Registration will begin at 8 a.m. on July 12th. 916/395-6003



Photo of Filipino-American family and friends in California's Delta region, during the 1930s, courtesy of Alexis Canillo.

HUMANITIES NEWS

CCH Awards Minigrants

"California Indian Shamanism" is a conference that will be held at California State University, Hayward on May 12. The conference will occur in connection with an exhibition of the same name at the Clarence E. Smith Museum at the university. The conference will be videotaped, and plans call for proceedings to be published by Ballina Press of Menlo Park. The award amount is \$1,500.

A lecture series on the culture of India will be presented by Cal Polytechnic State University in San Luis Obispo. The eight-part series, running from March through May 18, will include lectures such as "Religion and Politics of Modern India," "The Role of Women in Indian Thought," and "Asian Religions and the Western Mind." The award amount is \$1,500.

During the "Women and Humanities" conference at Pasadena City College in March, Ruthann Lum McNunn presented a slide/lecture on Chinese American women. The award amount is \$500.

In connection with the traveling exhibit "What Style Is It?" from the Smithsonian Museum, the Merced County Historical Society has received a \$600 minigrant for local programming and architectural photographs.

The Placentia Historical Committee will present a symposium/workshop on local history on May 12, "Doing a Community's History: The Placentia Project." The award amount is \$1,425.

Proposal-Writing Workshops Scheduled in Los Angeles and San Francisco

Workshops will take place in May for anyone interested in submitting a proposal for the July 2 deadline. In Los Angeles, they will be held May 22 and 24, from 10 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. In San Francisco, they are scheduled for May 10 and 15, 10 a.m. until 12 noon; also, a workshop geared to proposals for the "Environment and the Common Good" initiative will take place on May 30, from 10 a.m. to 12 noon.

Planning Grants

(Continued from page 1)

Eric Mann
Focus: environmental ethics
Labor/Community Strategy Center
6454 Van Nuys Blvd., #150
Van Nuys, CA 91401
818/781-9922

Gary D. Midkiff
Focus: environmental issues, Lake Tahoe
Tahoe Regional Planning Agency
P.O. Box 1038
Zephyr Cove, NV 89448
702/588-4547

Joseph Prabhu and H. Eric Schockman
Focus: inter-cultural awareness
Edmund G. Brown Institute of Public Affairs
California State University
5151 State University Drive
Library South, Rm. 4056
Los Angeles, CA 90032
213/343-3770

Common Threads Shines on Oscar Night

As an international television audience watched, Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman of San Francisco's Talking Pictures stepped onstage in March to accept the Academy Award for Best Documentary, which they earned for *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt*. The film they had created, with early support from CCH and major production funding from Home Box Office, chronicles the AIDS crisis through the stories of representative yet diverse AIDS patients: a founder of the Gay Olympics, an intravenous drug user, a young hemophiliac, a landscape architect. Just as poignantly, it explores the responses of the patients' families and friends to the suffering and loss the epidemic has brought. Each has created a panel in the now-gigantic AIDS Memorial Quilt and talks in the film about what that involvement has meant to them.

Inquiries about renting or purchasing *Common Threads* should go to Direct Cinema (213/396-4774).

The Academy also nominated as 1989's best documentary another film that CCH had sponsored, *Super Chief: The Life and Legacy of Earl Warren*, which was aired on PBS last fall. The film takes a close look at the achievements and ideals of the former California governor, who as U.S. Chief Justice led the Supreme Court in the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* school desegregation decision. It also examines the effect on Warren of his participation in the World War II internment of Japanese Americans. The film's project director was Bill Jersey of Berkeley's Quest Productions (415/548-0854).

CCH congratulates the filmmakers.

CCH Film & Speaker Minigrants Offered Statewide

At its December 1989 meeting, the Council expanded the CCH Film & Speaker program, so that all nonprofit groups in the state could apply for the minigrants of up to \$500. The program has already assisted many organizations to present local programs on topics of critical importance to Californians, like the environment, medical ethics, cultural diversity, and women's roles. Previously, the minigrants were available only to present programs for underserved audiences or for San Joaquin Valley audiences.

A simplified application procedure encourages nonprofits to choose a high-quality documentary film from those that CCH has funded and to arrange for a scholar to lead discussion about issues raised in the film. A new, expanded Film & Speaker Directory is now available, offering 26 films including the 1989 Academy Award winner, *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt*.

To request a copy of the new directory and minigrant application, clip out this coupon and mail to CCH, 315 West Ninth Street, Suite 1103, Los Angeles, CA 90015.

YES. Please send your new Film & Speakers Directory.

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

CALIFORNIA COUNCIL FOR THE HUMANITIES

312 Sutter Street
Suite 601
San Francisco, CA 94108
415/391-1474

315 W. Ninth Street
Suite 1103
Los Angeles, CA 90015
213/623-5993

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ARCO, Los Angeles

CARROL PARROTT BLUE
Assistant Professor of Film
San Diego State University

LILY CUNEO
Civic Leader
San Francisco

RICHARD ESPARZA
Museum Consultant
Santa Barbara

PAUL ESPINOSA
Director, Office of Hispanic Affairs
KPBS-TV, San Diego State University

KATHRYN GAEDDERT
Director
Sacramento History Center

ANN GARRY
Professor of Philosophy
California State University, Los Angeles

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Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences
UCLA Extension

PETER KLASSEN
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CATHERINE BABCOCK MAGRUDER
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NEXT PROPOSAL DEADLINE: July 2, 1990

Proposals for this deadline must conform to the 1990 Program Announcement. Send 10 copies of all proposals to the San Francisco office by the due date.

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HUMANITIES NETWORK

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"A Sense of Belonging, A Sense of Place"

Public Humanities Lecture and Conference Oakland, June 8 and 9



Each year the California Council for the Humanities selects a single community in the state and invites the public to participate in planning and presenting a series of humanities programs. This year Oakland residents are exploring "A Sense of Belonging, A Sense of Place," with special emphasis on living in a multi-cultural community. The Public Humanities Lecture on June 8 will be followed by an all-day conference, drawing from local scholars, artists, and community leaders. Additional events sponsored by a variety of nonprofit groups include a quilt exhibit, demonstrations of traditional Native California arts, and an all-day symposium on Jack London's life.

Writer Nikki Giovanni will deliver the 1990 Public Humanities Lecture. She talked recently with *Network* staff; the interview appears on page 2.

Top: Mask of Jennie Ong made by Oakland artist Calvin Yau Ching, part of the "1,000 Faces" exhibit (photo Marion Gray). *Middle:* Native California dancer in Local Cultures program, Festival at the Lake (photo by Michael A. Jones). *Bottom:* Preservation Park, looking toward City Center (photo by Phil Bellman, courtesy Oakland Heritage Alliance).

The California Council for the Humanities is a state-based affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities